

6. Are European citizens informed?

As has been stated in the editorial, the conduct of the Mega survey was principally to provide information in preparation for three information campaigns to be launched at the end of 1996 and into 1997. A central aspect was clearly to establish current levels of awareness and knowledge concerning various aspects of the Union.

In the following sections we examine how well citizens feel informed about a number of issues which can touch their daily lives. We go on to analyse responses to a series of factual questions about the Union and, finally, in Italy we examine awareness and importance of the Italian Presidency of the Council.

6.1 Feeling informed about the European Union

In the first instance respondents were asked about how well informed they felt about a series of areas, which could loosely be associated with the idea of "freedom of movement".

"Would you say you are well informed or not about:

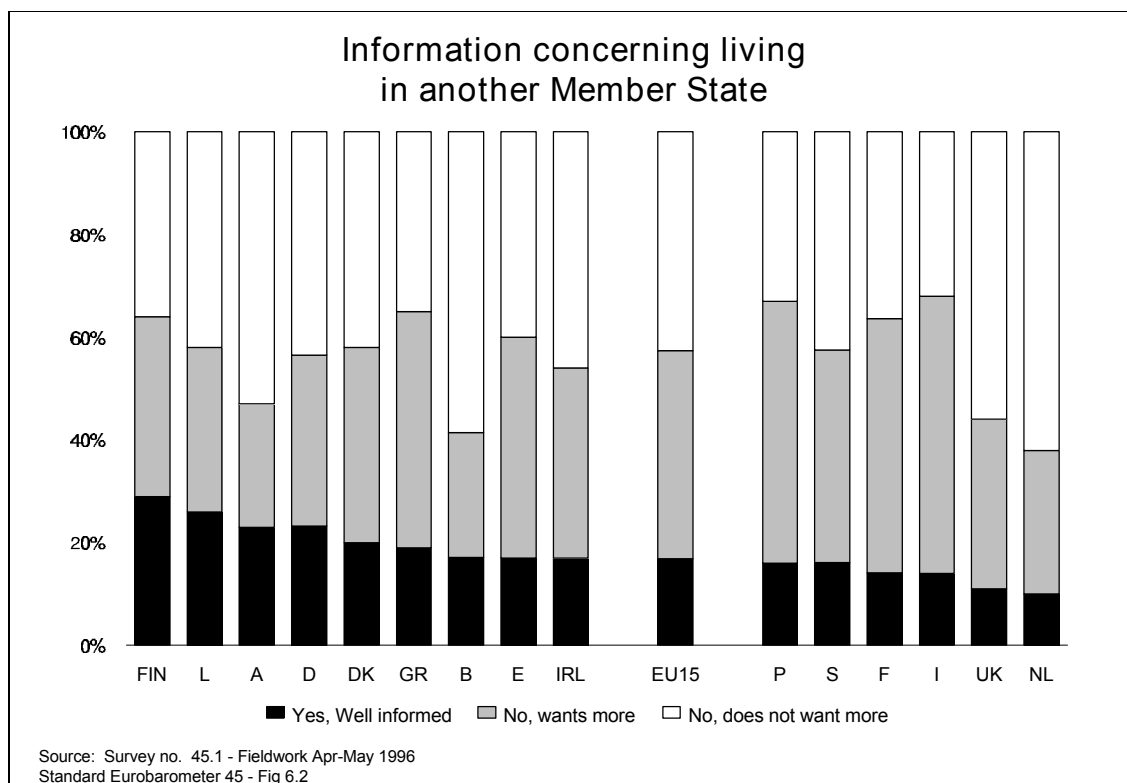
- living in another member state*
- working and/or setting up a business in another member state*
- studying in another member state*
- buying goods in another member state and bringing them into another member state without border formalities*
- being covered, even if you do not have a private medical insurance, for medical care you would receive in another member state."*

A follow-up question asked whether people felt the need to know more about each issue. On average, for all the five issues, only 17% of EU residents claimed to be well informed. A sizeable proportion (39%) amongst those who do not feel informed but would like to be, and 44% stated they were not informed and did not want to be. (Table 6.1)

Differences between the various issues were striking as the graph on the next page shows.

Living in another Member State

Only 17% of the sample felt sufficiently informed about living in another member state and of those not informed approximately half wanted more information. Levels of information ranged from relatively high scores in Finland (29%), Luxembourg (26%), Austria (24%) and Germany (23%) to under half that in the Netherlands (10%) and the United Kingdom (11%).



Working/setting up a business in another member state

Nearly half (48%) of the European Union population showed no interest in learning more about working/setting up a business in another member state. Only 14% claimed to be well informed and 38% would like to know more. The best informed were the Finns (25% considering themselves well informed), followed by the Luxembourgers (22%), the Germans (21%) and the Austrians (20%). The least informed were the British (7%) and the French (9%). In the demographic analysis we find men, the well educated and managers the best informed.

Studying in another member state

Only 16% of EU residents consider themselves well informed concerning opportunities for study away from their home country; these figures were highest in Finland, Luxembourg and Denmark. Predictably scores were above average amongst the 15-24 age group (21%) and those still studying (29%). Analysis of the "want to know more" category confirms that these are also the people who would like to find out more about study opportunities: 15-24 age group 44%, still studying 51%.

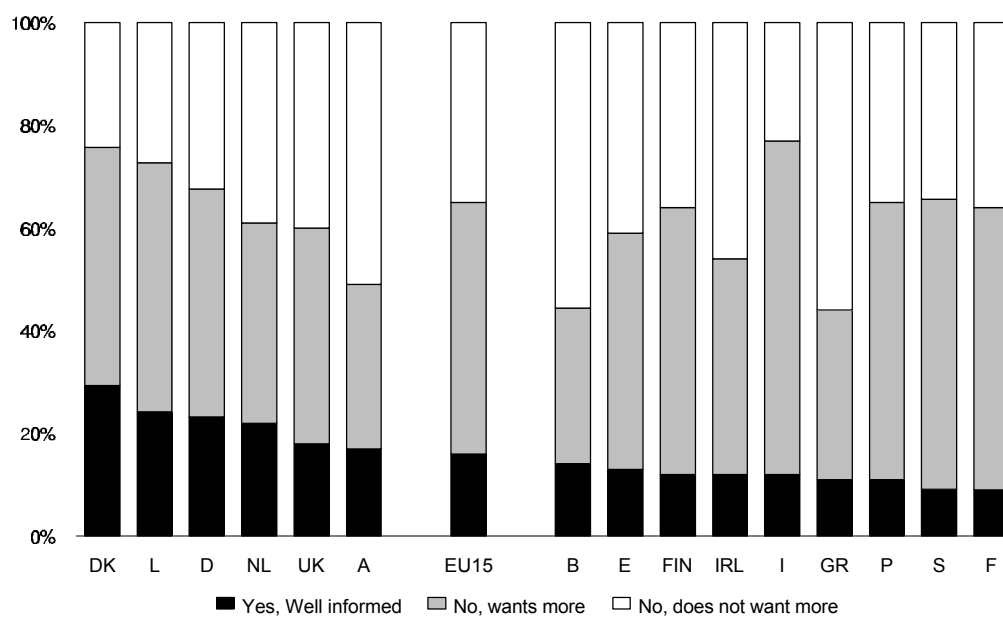
Buying goods in another member state

One in five claims to be well informed about the procedures for buying goods in one country and bringing them into another without border formalities. The highest levels of awareness were recorded in Germany and Austria (37% each); conversely, only 10% of Italians consider they are well informed. The Italians and the Greeks were the most likely to want extra information.

Medical cover in another member state

While only 16% of the respondents EU-wide felt they were well informed about medical coverage in another member state, we find nearly half wanting to know more. Of all the five topics covered in this question, this is the area where there is the greatest demand for more information. While living, working and studying away from one's country are somewhat specific to particular groups of people, most people feel the need to be informed about the important issue of medical insurance. (Tables 6.1 and 6.2)

Information concerning medical cover in the European Union



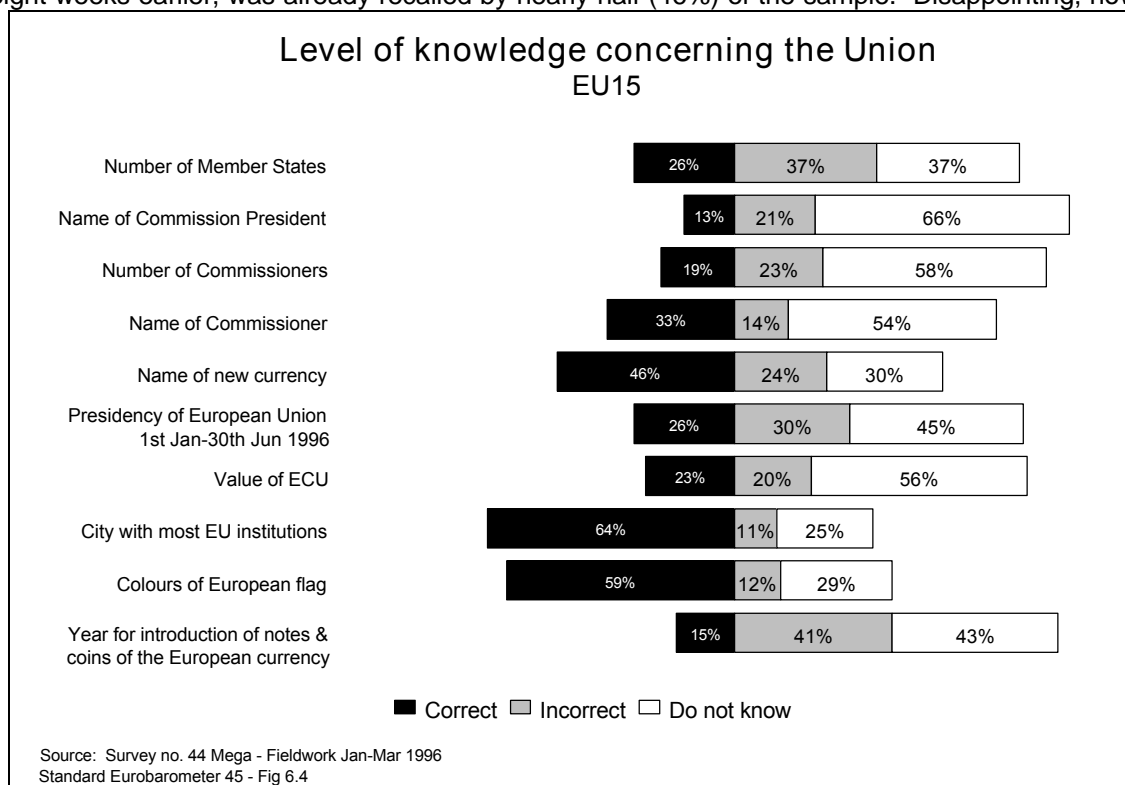
Source: Survey no. 45.1 - Fieldwork Apr-May 1996
Standard Eurobarometer 45 - Fig 6.3

6.2 Level of knowledge about the Union

European Union citizens have frequently been asked to subjectively evaluate their level of knowledge of the Union, but in the Mega survey we were able to ask a number of factual questions. The first of which was to ask respondents about ten items concerning the Union:

- The current number of states in the Union
- The name of the President of the European Commission
- The number of (nationality) Commissioners
- The name of one (nationality) Commissioner
- The recently chosen name for the European currency
- The country which holds the Presidency of the European Union since 1st January until end of June 1996
- The current value of the ECU in national currency
- The city in which most of the European Union institutions are located (one of two)
- One of the two colours of the European flag
- The year when notes and coins in the European currency will be introduced¹

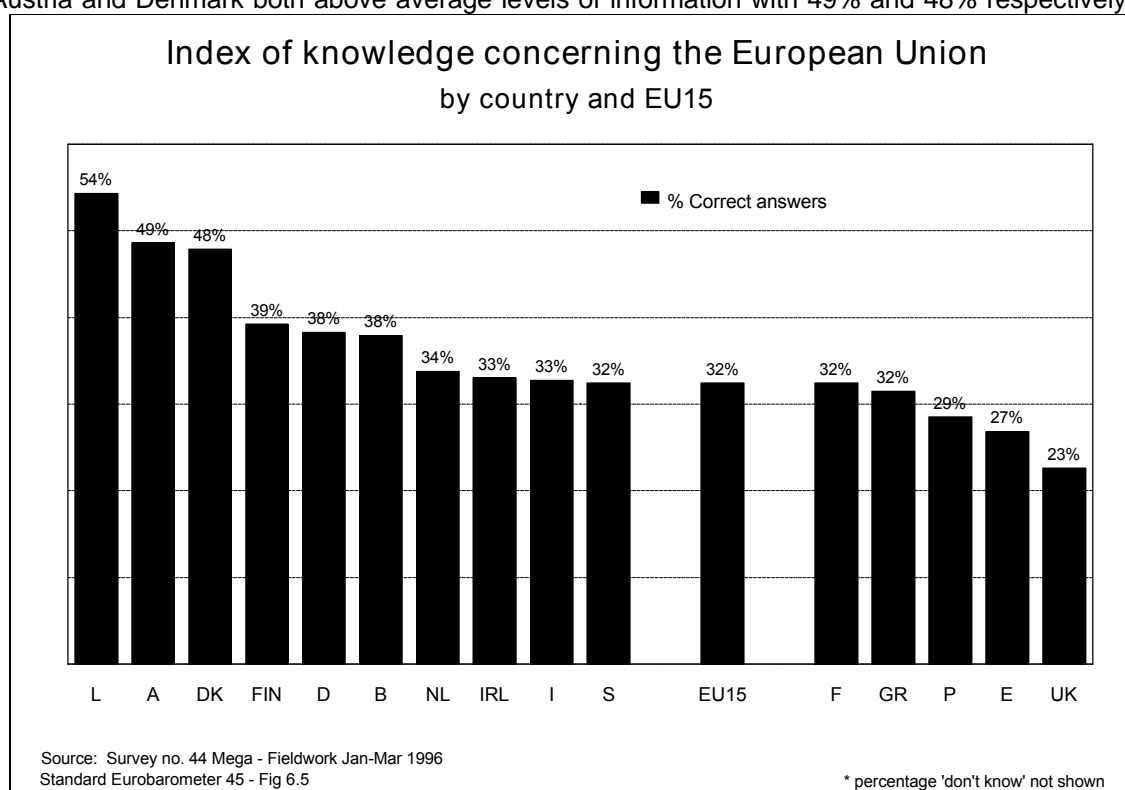
While recognition of the European cities (Luxembourg or Brussels) and the flag were the highest, it was interesting to see that the name of the new currency, which had been announced some six to eight weeks earlier, was already recalled by nearly half (46%) of the sample. Disappointing, however,



was the fact that only one in four persons was able to give the current number of states forming the European Union. (Table 6.3)

¹ Correct answers are shown in Table 6.3.

Individual country answers are to be found in Table 6.3, but we have also constructed an index of knowledge by country giving the average percentage of correct answers for each. Overall, the average EU score was 32%, Luxembourg being the only country to score above half with 54%. Austria and Denmark both above average levels of information with 49% and 48% respectively. The

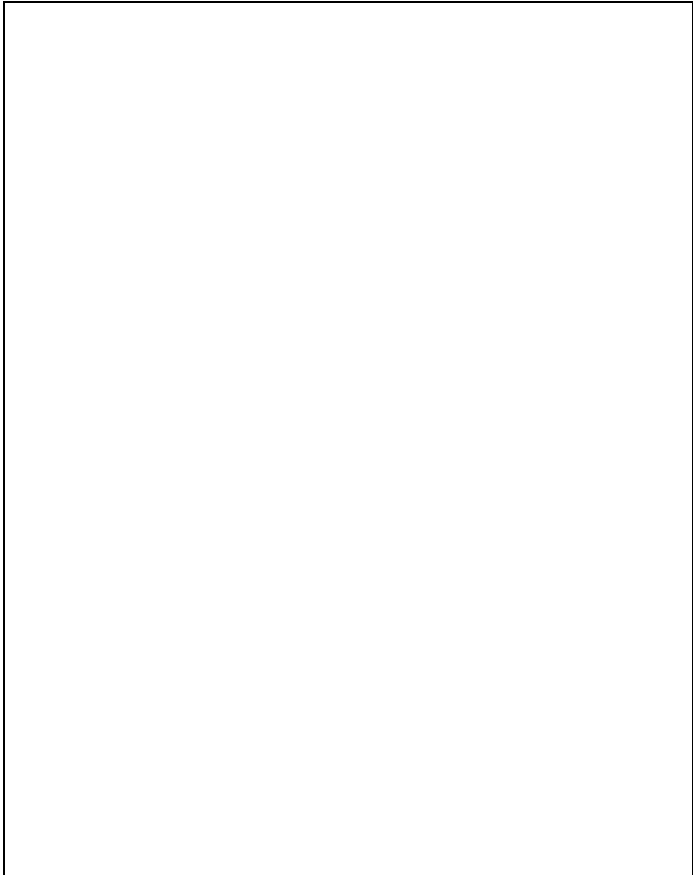
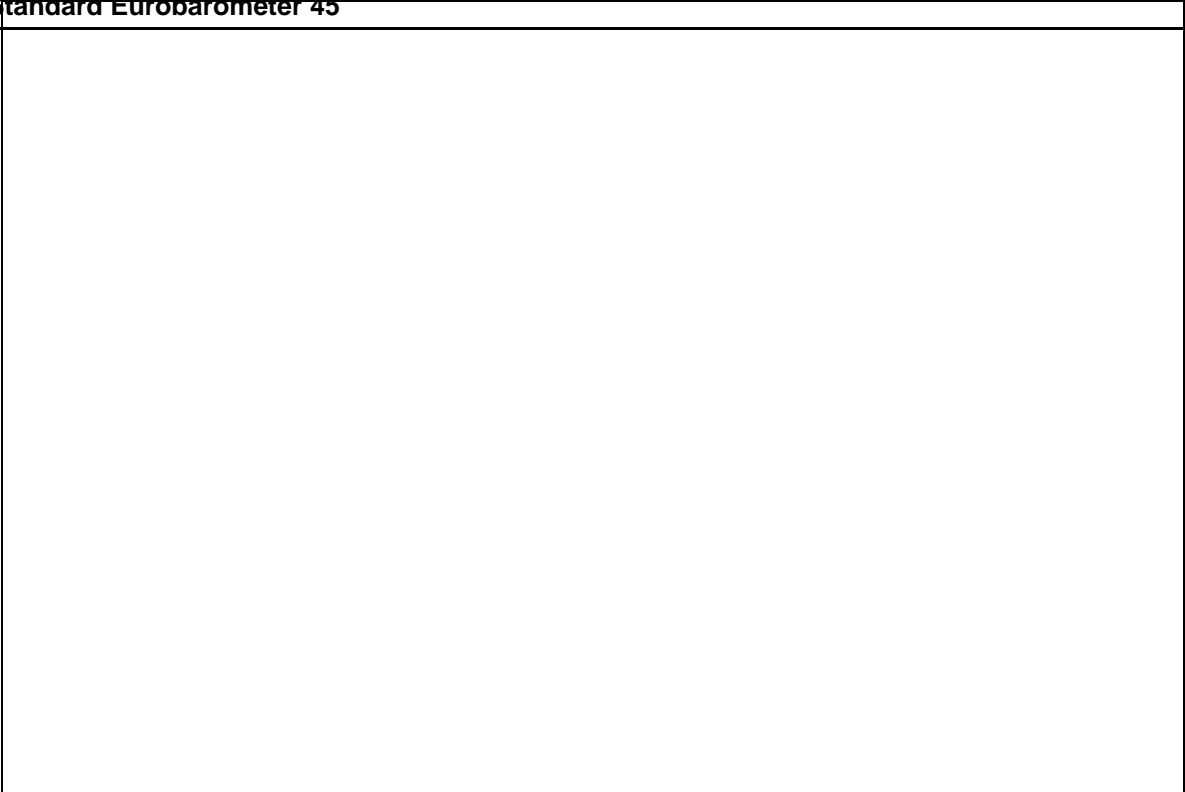


least informed were the British (23%), followed by the Spanish (27%) and the Portuguese (29%).

The demographic analyses confirm that, on all items, men are likely to give significantly more correct answers than women. Generally speaking, the 25-54 age group is better informed, as are those of high education level, opinion leaders, managers and to a slightly lesser extent the self-employed. (Table 6.4)

6.3 Knowledge concerning the Union budget

Bearing in mind the importance of financing the various European Union activities, respondents were asked on which aspect most of the European Union budget was spent. While 22% were unable to give an opinion, the largest proportion, a third, felt that most went towards paying for staff, meetings and buildings. Only 17% mentioned the Common Agricultural Policy, a further 17% cited internal/structural funds (social and regional), while 12% specified support to third countries. (Table 6.5 and 6.6)

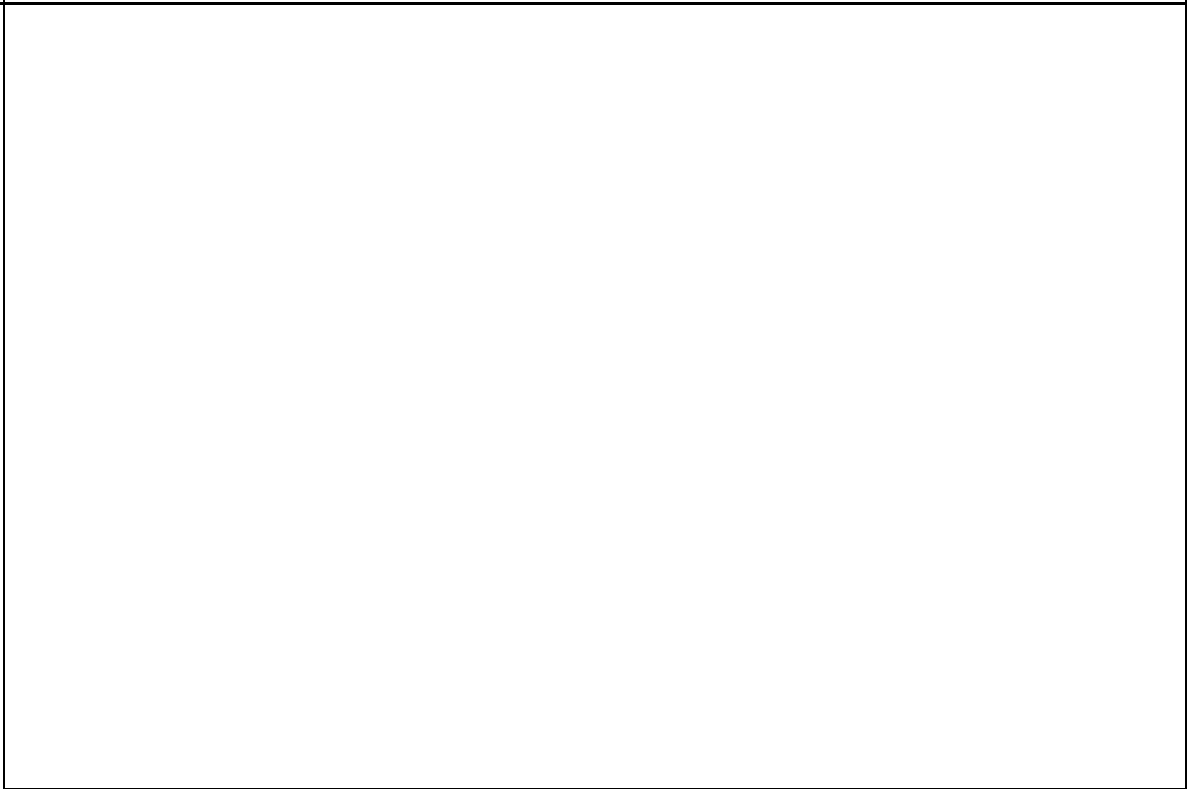


If we make a comparison with the actual 1996 budget as shown in Figure 6.7, we see that misconceptions are rife. In reality, the agricultural budget accounts for the greatest proportion of spending, followed by structural funds, but even more interesting is the fact that while administrative

expenditure accounts for a mere 5% of the budget, it is perceived as the most important item by the general public.

Analysis of the two items, namely agriculture and administration by country shows that even in countries that scored relatively high on the knowledge index, there was a serious lack of real knowledge as the following two graphs show.

In the demographic analysis it is clear that the less positive the respondent is the more they believe that the greatest proportion of the budget is given to administration costs (positive attitudes 27% : negative attitudes 47%)



6.4 The Italian Presidency

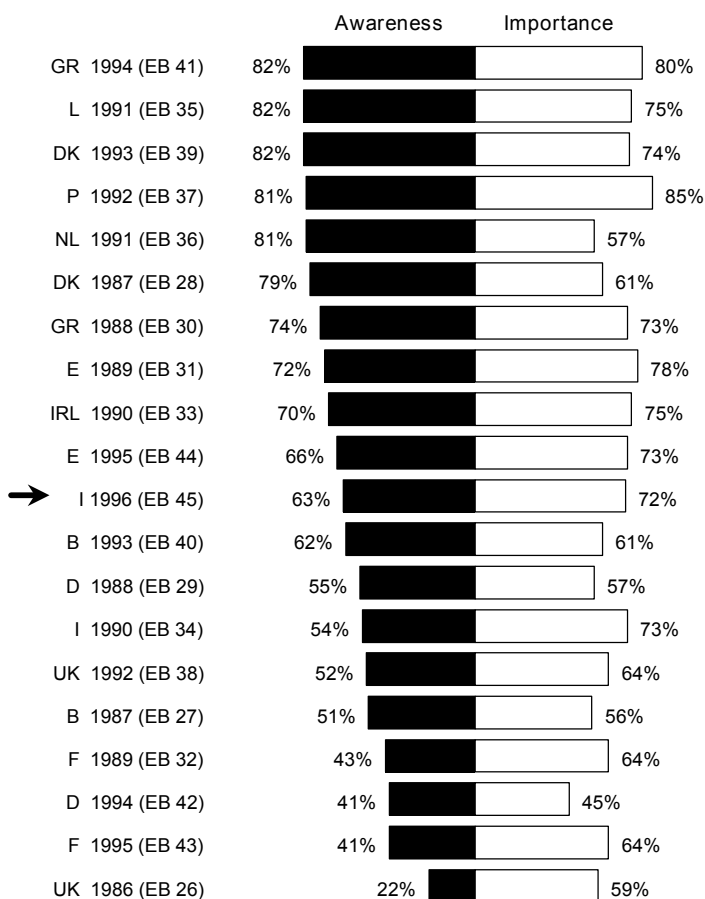
Since the Autumn of 1986, a question has regularly been asked in each standard Eurobarometer on the awareness and image of the presidency amongst the citizens whose country is holding the presidency at the time of the survey.

In the first half of 1996 the presidency was held by Italy and on the 1st of July it was the turn of Ireland. Two-thirds of Italians interviewed recalled having read or heard about their country's role. This was a substantial increase (+9%) from 1990 when Italy last held the presidency. The second question was designed to measure the level of importance people attach to their country assuming the presidency. Overall, nearly three in four (73%) rated the role as important. This figure is very similar to the 1990 figure.

Generally speaking, we tend to observe lower awareness figures for the presidency in the larger member states, while in the smaller countries awareness frequently reaches between 70 and 80 percent. Levels of importance are not necessarily related to the size of the country in the same way

as the graph below indicates.

Awareness and importance of the Council Presidency



Source: Survey no 45.1 - Fieldwork Apr-May 1996
Standard Eurobarometer 45 - Fig 6.10

* not aware/not important and 'don't know' not shown